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Making the Most of Your CO-OP ANNUAL MEETING

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COOPERATIVE RESEARCH AND SERVICE DIVISION
FARM CREDIT ADMINISTRATION
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D. C.

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COOPERATIVE RESEARCH AND SERVICE DIVISION

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FOREWORD

During the war many farmers' cooperatives found it necessary to neglect their membership-relations programs because of the lack of manpower as well as the shortage of gasoline, tires, and other necessary equipment. Farmers themselves, working long hours on an all-out production program, often short of help and short of equipment, found less time to attend meetings even of their own cooperative associations.

Now that the war is over, farmers' cooperatives are looking ahead and planning their peacetime operations. Among other things, membership problems and attitudes will need careful attention. No doubt many new members have come into the organization since the war started. Others will come in during the next few years as servicemen return and take up farming. Some of the old members may have lost contact and will need to be brought up to date regarding some of the more recent developments and future plans.

The annual meeting is a good starting point for bringing the association and its members closer together. It provides an opportunity for the directors and the management of a cooperative to sit down with the members and discuss the operations of the association and to plan for future activities. If carefully planned and properly executed, the annual meeting program can be an important factor in stimulating good will and in building good membership relations.

This circular was designed to offer helpful suggestions to cooperative managers and others who are charged with the responsibility of planning and conducting annual meeting programs. It is directed primarily to the smaller cooperative associations which operate locally and invite the entire membership to the annual meeting. It is recognized that large-scale organizations whose annual meetings are attended by delegates chosen to represent local groups may have problems different from those discussed here.

Harold Hedges, Chief
Cooperative Research and Service Division

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR ANNUAL MEETING

by French M. Hyre
Senior Agricultural Economist

I. CUT-AND-DRIED - OR ALIVE AND INTERESTING?

The annual meeting of a farmers' cooperative association can be anything from a routine formality to a gala occasion. It can be anything from a cut-and-dried assemblage to a live and interesting party. It can be dull or memorable. It can be unimportant or worth while.

It may require, on the one hand, a frantic last minute scurry to round up a quorum. It may involve, at the other extreme, a search for enough chairs for the people to sit on. The choice of the kind of meeting is almost entirely in the hands of the board of directors and the management.

If the annual meeting is held simply to comply with the letter of the bylaws, there is little chance of its being anything but drab and monotonous. But if it is held in the spirit of cooperative procedure, as a yearly occasion when the members and the officials of their association get together to discuss the operations and the future plans for their cooperative - that is something entirely different.

Each year, farmers' cooperative marketing and purchasing associations hold some 10,000 annual meetings. Here are 10,000 opportunities to build good will and to stimulate interest in the cooperative way of doing business; opportunities for the officers of each association to sit down with the member-patrons and discuss with them the affairs of their association - its aims, its purposes, its objectives, its accomplishments. The annual meeting affords the members a chance to ask questions and offer suggestions. It provides the management the occasion to explain and discuss operating policies and to sound out the reaction of the members. Most important of all, it gives the management an opportunity to instill more firmly in the mind of each member the thought that "This is my association. I share in its ownership and control. It is being operated for my benefit. I have a direct responsibility for its success."

The holding of an effective annual meeting is a responsibility of the cooperative's directors and management. While the first responsibility of the directors is for an efficient organization from the standpoint of financing, processing, merchandising, and the supervision of credit and collections, a second responsibility, and one which is just as important, is the maintenance of satisfactory relations between the association and its members. Well planned annual meetings are a means to this end.

Where effective annual meetings are not the rule, it is more than likely because officers and directors fail to realize that such meetings provide one of the best opportunities of the year to build good will, loyalty, and membership support.

Figure 1. - Over-all plans for the meeting should be made by the board of directors.

II. THE PURPOSES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING

The skeleton form of the annual meeting is usually outlined in an association's bylaws. The order of business probably includes reading of minutes, annual reports of officers and committees, election of directors, unfinished business, and new business.

This is a simple formula, but it contains all that is needed for a successful membership meeting. The chief purpose of the annual meeting, stated in a broad general way, is to review the program and the business of the cooperative for the past year and to plan future activities. The greater the membership participation, the more successful the meeting.

The members exercise their control of the cooperative at the annual meeting (1) by electing their directors; (2) by receiving and passing upon the reports of their officers; and (3) by contributing comments and suggestions on the conduct of the business and voting upon matters of policy which may be placed before them. Occasionally they may (4) vote on changing or amending the bylaws or other organization papers.

1. Election of directors is the first of the members' democratic privileges and responsibilities. Generally, the bylaws provide that the directors shall be elected by a vote of the members at the annual meeting. It is through the power to elect directors that the members exercise control over the policies of the association. This, then, is a vital part of the annual meeting and every possible precaution should be taken, therefore, to assure a fair and intelligent selection.

The importance of this is emphasized when it is considered that "all the corporate powers of an association are vested in its directors; that is, the directors of an association collectively and primarily possess all

the powers that the association has under the law.... They determine, either expressly or by implication, directly or indirectly the acts to be performed and the plans and methods to be followed by the officers, agents, and employees of the association."[1]

2. Reports of the officers, as has been said, provides one of the best opportunities of the year for the management to "bring the members up-to-date" on the progress made by their association. It is the logical time to review and analyze the 12 months' business, and to discuss the trends in membership, volume, and costs of operations. It is an opportune occasion to go into the financial status, and to emphasize again that the member's investment in his cooperative is as important a part of his farm business as his investment in a tractor, truck, or any other piece of farm machinery.

From the members' point of view, the annual reports are part of their due. They are entitled to know all the pertinent facts concerning their organization. Properly presented and intelligently discussed, the annual reports are a basis of mutual understanding between the management and the members.

Annual reports can also serve a further purpose. "An analysis of the entire association set-up is frequently refreshing," points out one manager, "even to those who have been in the organization for many, many years. Those who have lived with the organization and have done their part toward helping to build it to its present position come to assume that every member of the association is equally well informed regarding all these detailed matters. But the story must be told over and over again for the benefit of those who have not, as yet, gotten the full grasp of the cooperative picture."

3. Contributing suggestions and possibly voting on policy matters are an important phase of membership participation - particularly at the annual meeting. Members should not only be permitted to ask questions and offer suggestions, but should be encouraged to do so. It may at times be desirable to give members a formal voice in the determining of certain policies by putting such matters to a vote. Whether or not this is done, the members are entitled at all times to an informal voice in democratic and free-for-all discussion.

It is not always possible to anticipate all the questions that the members will have on the association and its operations. Some may want to know more about the organization's capital structure or about its operating policies. Others may want more detailed information concerning operating costs. Some may have heard rumors critical of certain phases of the cooperative's activities. The annual meeting gives the member an opportunity to bring all such matters before the association for discussion and clarification.

[1]Hulbert, L. S. Legal Phases of Cooperative Associations. Farm Credit Administration Bul. 50, 456 pp. 1942.

Members should be encouraged to offer suggestions, particularly on ways and means of improving the association's services. Education in the cooperative field is not a one-way avenue. It is a give and take proposition. Much of the progress in cooperative organization and cooperative practices has come about as the result of practical suggestions made by members.

It should be anticipated, of course, that in general discussions there may be some differences of opinion and that occasionally heated arguments may result. These are not necessarily harmful, and with skillful handling by the chairman they may be beneficial. By the airing of grievances and the bringing to light of any smoldering dissatisfactions that might later flare up, there may be avoided much more serious dissatisfaction at a later time. It is much better to have any problems and weaknesses of the association discussed in the meeting hall than to have them argued on the street corner.

4. Voting on amendments to bylaws or other organization papers is a membership matter which occasionally arises. Changing economic conditions, or merely the growth and expansion of the business, may make it desirable for an association to change or amend its organization papers. This usually can be done only by a vote of the association's membership, and as a matter of practice is generally held for consideration by the members at the annual meeting.

Legally, an association cannot engage in any activity or handle any commodity or perform any service unless authorized to do so by its charter. Through its bylaws, an association regulates its voting procedure; sets the time and place of its annual meeting; and regulates the transfer of its stock from one person to another. Through its bylaws, an association may also provide for the use of a contract or marketing agreement; outline the manner in which its members' products are to be handled; and specify the procedure of making settlement with the growers.

III. SECRETS OF AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

Good meetings seldom "just happen" - and yet the secret of a good meeting is so simple that it is often overlooked. It consists of nothing more nor less than careful planning.

Careful planning must of course be followed through by the execution of the plans that have been laid, but advance planning is the main spring which sets the wheels moving. Without such planning there is usually a good deal of waste motion - if there is any motion at all.

Planning in Advance

Almost as important as the planning itself, moreover, is the time when the planning is started. This must be far in advance of the day of the meeting - weeks before - months before - long before. Detailed plans cannot be developed overnight. Qualified speakers cannot be found at the last minute. Arrangements for the use of a suitable hall with plenty

of chairs, a blackboard, chalk, erasers, charts, and other essential facilities usually cannot be taken care of on the day of the meeting. It is too late, after the meeting has started, to decide whether or not there is going to be a free lunch. All these details, and many others, must be arranged far in advance.

The responsibility for this planning rests squarely upon the shoulders of the manager and the board of directors. Their planning must cover (a) arranging the time and place; (b) building up the program; (c) getting out the crowd; and (d) staging the meeting itself.

Stated in another way the four essentials of a good meeting are (a) adequate and proper facilities; (b) a stimulating and well-balanced program; (c) a large representative attendance; and (d) membership participation. A meeting which falls down in any one of these respects cannot be said to have been entirely successful.

Each of the four general phases of the planning - as well as the four essentials of a good meeting - is interdependent on the others. Although they are discussed separately in the following pages, the management and directors should tackle them together, and continuously, on a four-flank approach.

Getting the Members to Help

Like other responsibilities of the management and directors, planning the annual meeting is a job that may be delegated in part to the members themselves. The more people who feel a personal responsibility in making the meeting a success, the more successful the meeting is likely to be.

Thus, the president may appoint to help plan and carry out the meeting a number of special committees to work with the association's officers and directors - perhaps a program committee, an attendance committee, a lunch committee, and an entertainment committee. In some of the larger associations covering wide territories, local annual meeting committees have been appointed in each district for the purpose of contributing suggestions and contacting the members.

IV. ARRANGING THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Time and place are the first two things to be decided in planning the annual meeting, and both points have considerable bearing upon the number of persons who can or will attend. Both the time and the place usually are designated in the association's bylaws, but with enough latitude to permit some choice - at least as to the actual meeting place.

The time of the meeting should be one which best suits the convenience of most of the members. Few people feel they can attend meetings when they are otherwise busy with important jobs on their farms. More will be likely to attend if the meeting is held some time during the slack season; after the rush of the harvest season is past and before the work

on the next season's crop has begun. Generally this fits in with the fiscal year and permits the meeting to be held soon after the close of the year's operations. There should be allowed, however, sufficient time after the close of the fiscal year for an audit to be made, and for the manager and officers to prepare adequate and intelligent reports covering the year's operation.

The time of day and the day of the week also may be factors affecting attendance. If it is found that the time is inconvenient and is tending to cut down attendance, the bylaws can be amended to provide a more suitable occasion.

The place of meeting should (a) be favorably located; (b) have adequate seating capacity; and (c) be comfortable from the standpoints of heat, light, ventilation, and other arrangements.

Convenience of location, while important, is not the only consideration in selecting the hall. Aside from the attributes of the room itself, it is well to consider surrounding conditions. Outside voices and disturbances divert attention and detract from the success of the gathering. It is simply a detail of careful planning to avoid nearby ball games, congested traffic conditions, parking lots, building construction, steam-shovel operations, auction sales, garages, or other annoying distractions.

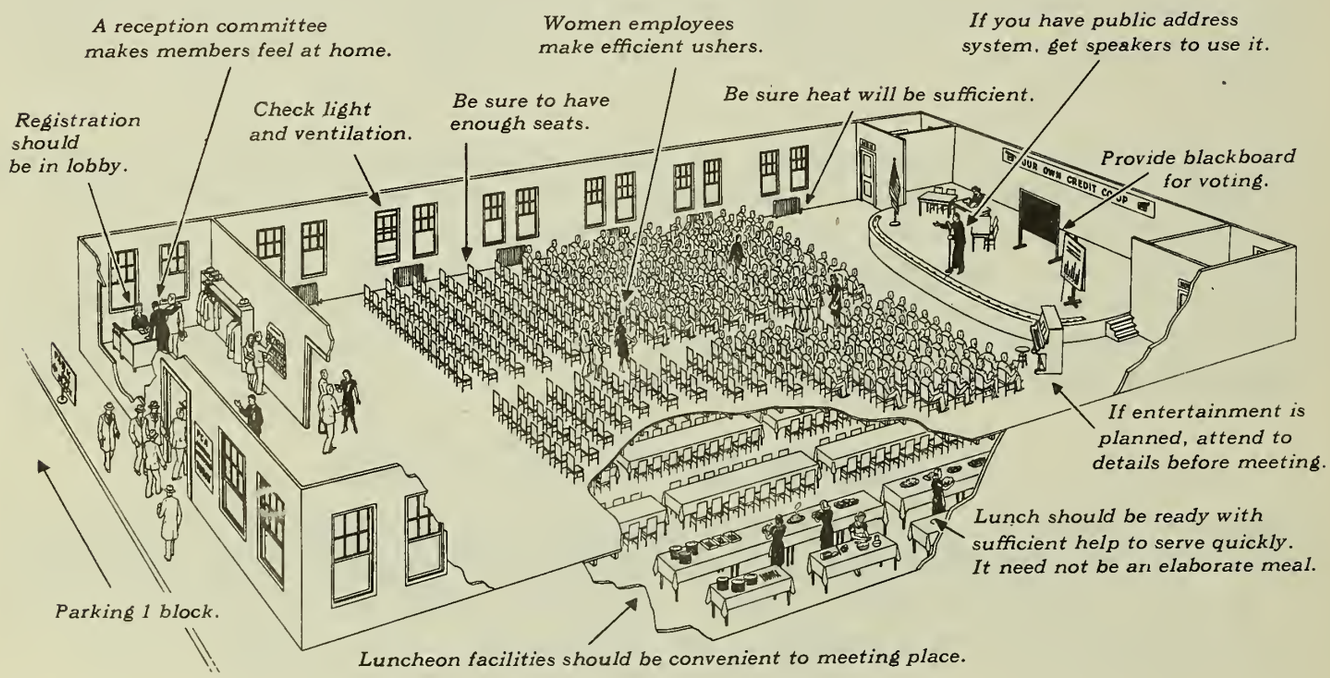

Figure 2. - The meeting place, as well as the program, needs to be carefully planned.

Adequate seating capacity is perhaps the first point of importance in the hall itself. To invite people without providing them seats is as discourteous as it is uncomfortable. And persons standing, even around the edges of the room, are continually shifting their weight from one foot

to the other and occasionally moving about. This is distracting even to those who are seated and frequently takes their attention away from the speaker. The results are unsatisfactory all the way around.

By taking into consideration attendance at previous meetings, by talking to one or more members from each community, or by advance "checking" in some other way, it should be possible to estimate fairly accurately the number who are likely to attend. It is better to have a meeting hall that is too large than one that is too small.

Comfortable surroundings also help tremendously in securing the undivided attention of those attending the meeting. Before a hall is finally decided upon, someone should inspect it to make certain that it is suitable. Consideration should be given particularly to heating, lighting, and ventilation. Neither a cold room nor a dark, dingy one is desirable.

The arrangement of the room is likewise a point in comfort and, therefore, can have considerable effect upon the success of the meeting.

A room with the entrance at the rear is highly desirable since this will permit members to enter or leave the room with a minimum of confusion. It is much better to have the light enter the room from the side or the rear rather than from the front. A speaker's platform makes it easier for the audience to see the speaker and is particularly desirable in cases where the audience is large and the floor is not elevated toward the rear. A blackboard, chalk, and erasers, as well as a convenient place to hang charts often can be used to advantage. Toilet facilities should be available. A convenient place to hang coats and hats is worthy of consideration.

If it is a large meeting a public address system may be needed. If such is the case it might be well to arrange in advance for the speakers to use it.

V. BUILDING UP THE PROGRAM

A well-balanced program for the annual meeting consists of three general ingredients: business, entertainment, and information. The business portion includes such routine and formal matters as the election of directors. The entertainment may be musical or other performances; it may include a lunch or dinner; or it may be a game or contest feature in which all can participate. The informational portion usually is made up of reports by association officials, and it may include talks by "outside" speakers.

In building up the program, the individuals or the committees responsible for the job must first decide what is to be included under each of the three classifications. They must next decide on the arrangement, or the sequence, of events. And, in considering both what is to be on the program and the order in which it is scheduled, they must keep in mind the all-important matter of timing.

There is only a certain amount of time available. This time should be apportioned so that neither the business, the information, nor the entertainment parts of the program overbalance one another. It should be handled so that the meeting neither drags nor runs beyond a reasonable period. A definite closing time is as important as a definite starting time. The members appreciate knowing in advance that they will be able to get home for the evening chores, if it is a daytime meeting, or at a definite time at night, if it is an evening session.

The time allotted to each subject on the program, and its particular position on the program, should therefore be carefully planned. Each speaker should be given a definite limit on the length of his talk. Adequate time should be allowed for discussion of reports and other matters. If there are to be "gaps" in the program - as, for example, when ballots are being counted - they should be filled by incidental details such as the introduction of guests, the reading of announcements, or the presentation of the less-important reports.

The staging of a successful annual meeting, like that of any other event in which a large number of people participate, requires a certain amount of showmanship. Showmanship is nothing more than holding the interest of a group or a crowd. Holding interest is largely a matter of subject matter, program arrangement, and timing. Some of the fundamental factors to be kept in mind can be summarized in three simple don'ts.

Don't deaden the meeting by confining it exclusively to business and information. Don't let it drag by including too-lengthy speeches or too-tedious reports, or by leaving empty gaps when nothing is happening. On the other hand, don't overcrowd it to the extent of perhaps having to leave something out at the last minute, running overtime, or failing to have ample time for members' questions and discussion.

Planning the Business Procedure

The business portion of the annual meeting includes all matters which, according to the association's bylaws, must be voted upon by the members - such as the election of directors and any changes in the articles of incorporation, bylaws, or marketing agreements. It also may include balloting on policy matters which the directors may wish to place before the membership for action, and it includes acceptance of reports.

The procedure for amending the association's papers is set forth in the bylaws, and requires advance planning of notices and other legal requirements. The procedure for the nominations of directors may also be defined in the bylaws. If it is not, it should be determined by the directors in planning the meeting. In general, there are two steps in the election of directors: (1) the nominations; and (2) the voting. As in other association affairs, however, a period of discussion may profitably be introduced, and may encourage the member to think in terms of "the best man for the job" rather than in terms of "which one of my friends I'd like to see elected."

1. Handling the nominations. - If the nominations are to be made by a nominating committee, the members should be appointed far enough in advance of the meeting to give sufficient time for careful and wise selections, with due consideration for geographic representation. The advantage of a nominating committee is that it can take time to discover the men whom it considers outstanding in their knowledge of the association; their interest in its affairs; and their experience, integrity, and tact. The disadvantage of a nominating committee is that it is always vulnerable to the charge that may be made that the elections are "railroaded."

To get around any feeling that the elections are manipulated, additional nominations to those of the nominating committee may be called for. In some local associations all nominations are made either by written ballot or orally from the floor. The danger in relying entirely on these methods is that the best ability in the organization may be inadvertently overlooked.

2. Voting on the nominations. - Even the business of voting enters into the advance planning for the meeting. In most associations this is done by written ballot in order to free each member from outside influence, or from embarrassment, in voting for the individual he feels is best fitted. Counting the ballots necessarily takes time - and the most profitable use of the time that ballot counting is going on is one of the many small but important details that call for planning in order to assure a smooth-running and interesting meeting.

Figure 3. - Voting by ballot frees the member from outside influence and permits him to vote for the candidate he feels is best qualified.

Adding the Spice of Entertainment

Of all the ingredients for a successful annual meeting the entertainment portion may be the most important because, like seasoning on food, it makes the whole affair more attractive. It helps to bring out some of the members and their families who might not otherwise attend. It helps to place all members in a more receptive mood when they are there. Business details

and informational talks, although not necessarily dull, require mental concentration if they are to be mentally digested. Most people cannot concentrate over long periods; their attention wanders. Therefore, it is mentally stimulating to "break the monotony" at intervals by entertainment.

Entertainment need not be costly. It need not be elaborate. But it ought to be "good." It need not be professional. Local soloists, duet teams, quartets, bands, or orchestras fit well for brief interludes on any program. They can be worked in at almost any time. Nonmusical acts, such as magicians or comedians, require more of a "build up" to be effective, and are more suitable for lunch or dinner meetings.

Motion pictures and dramatic presentations, when used, are best fitted for the end and climax of the meeting, particularly if it is a night session.

The best entertainment of all, in the opinion of many, is a meal - whether it be a lunch, an evening banquet, or a supper at the end of an evening meeting. A meal, of course, involves some specialized planning that is best delegated to an individual or committee with no other responsibility. Unless the meal is extremely simple, it involves knowing in advance the number who will attend. This means that the members must be contacted before the meeting by mail or telephone, or in person. It calls either for reservations or for the sale or issuance of tickets. This is a job that requires a good deal of work, but it insures that everyone will know when and where the meeting is to be held. It is a most effective type of advance publicity for "getting out the crowd."

Another type of entertainment, and one which is well suited to a cooperative meeting, is that in which the members entertain each other. This includes spelling bees, question boxes, and "Professor Quiz" or "Information Please" contests. This type of contest can be educational as well as entertaining if the questions selected relate to the association and its operations. Here again, however, advance planning is very essential. The master of ceremonies must not only have his contest material ready, but he should have a few "victims" or bellweathers in the crowd who are primed to pick up the cues and help put the party across. Games and contests in which everyone participates should usually be used only to climax and wind up the meeting.

Partly in the category of entertainment and partly business is the practice adopted by some cooperatives of making the annual meeting the occasion for distributing checks representing patronage dividends, or equities in the revolving capital. By making more or less a ceremony of what would otherwise be a routine business procedure, there is a certain entertainment value gained and there is a very effective dramatization of membership participation.

Another occasion which frequently has turned into an entertaining ceremony is the burning of the mortgage on the cooperative plant.

Planning the Informational Features

The informational portion of the annual meeting should be the meat of the program, as far as the members are concerned. The reports and exhibits should bring them up-to-date on the affairs of their association and the conditions under which it operates, and the discussions which properly follow should give them the opportunity to offer suggestions, comments, and questions.

Although annual reports are matters of business information to the members, they should also be informational in an interpretative sense. A treasurer's report, for example, might properly consist of simply an operating statement and a balance sheet - but to be most valuable to the cooperative and its members the report should also interpret the figures in order to present to the members a clear and accurate picture of their business enterprise.

The president's or the manager's report, by the same token, might be a simple recitation of the past year's operations. It will be more worthwhile, however, if it also includes a discussion of the organization's policies and policy changes; its aims and objectives; its accomplishments and failures of accomplishment; and its cooperative set-up.

If handled rightly, the annual meeting presents an ideal opportunity to develop cooperative understanding and a desire for further cooperative action. The starting point is information - "cards-on-the-table" information as far as the cooperative itself is concerned, and background information as far as external conditions are concerned. The informational part of the meeting includes (1) reports and talks by association officials, (2) financial reports, and (3) talks by "outside speakers."

1. Reports and talks by association officials. - In planning the information end of the program there are the two questions to be decided: Who is to speak and what subjects are to be covered? The number of speakers is limited by the desirability of not "loading the program" with association officers to the exclusion of other features.

If it is decided that, besides the presentation of the financial report, more than one other official is to speak, it is obviously practical that they get together to plan the ground that each is to cover. There may be some points that are so important that they deserve mention by each and every speaker. But there are many other points that will bore the listeners if repeated in detail. Furthermore, it is embarrassing to the second speaker to discover that a part of the talk he had prepared to give has been appropriated by the first speaker.

If the boundaries between the subject matter are clearly defined - if the manager and the president do not both review the history of the association, and if the secretary and the sales manager do not both give the same details on the merchandising program, for example - two speakers talking 20 minutes each will probably hold the attention of the listeners better than one speaker talking for 40 minutes. The exception is when the one speaker is an unusually effective talker.

2. Financial reports. - The financial statements may be presented by the manager, treasurer, or one of the other officers, depending on who is best equipped to do the job. Some associations also arrange for the auditor to be present.

Regardless of who is given the assignment, the report should be carefully prepared and carefully presented. Ordinarily, a statement of income and expense and an up-to-date balance sheet are included. Operating costs should be fully explained and compared with operating costs of the previous year. Assets, liabilities, and net worth items should be discussed and compared with similar items of a year earlier. Any significant changes should be pointed out and explained. But, this is only half of the story.

The effectiveness of the financial report depends as much upon the manner in which it is presented as upon its contents. Too often a good report loses its significance because the members are unable to follow the speaker and grasp the meaning of what he says. There are two reasons why this is so. In the first place, the average person often is not familiar with many of the terms commonly used in accounting. In the second place, many reports are read too rapidly and contain too much poorly organized detail.

It should not be taken for granted that everyone is familiar either with the form in which financial statements ordinarily are presented or with the terminology customarily used in accounting. The average person is not accustomed to dealing in terms of "accrued assets," "fixed liabilities," and "reserves for contingencies." Assets sometimes need to be presented in terms of "what the association owns" and liabilities in terms of "what the association owes." Ordinarily, it isn't enough to point to a figure and call it "depreciation." The speaker needs to go further and discuss the rate at which the cost of certain assets are being written off and to explain why this is considered to be a good business practice.

Because of the very nature of the financial report, the speaker must deal in terms of statistics. He must necessarily quote figures. But to stand before a group of people and read, one by one, the items on an operating statement or balance sheet is not an effective way of presenting this type of information. It "goes in one ear and out the other."

It will help considerably if the members can have before them a copy of the operating statement or balance sheet being discussed. This may be accomplished by the use of a chart in the front of the room, large enough for all to see. Or, it may be done by distributing printed copies among the members.

Individual items shown on the financial statements are most significant when compared with certain other items - for example, the amount of money spent for salaries and wages has little significance except when compared with the total volume of business transacted. The loss from bad debts does not mean a great deal unless one knows how much business was

done on credit. Repairs for machinery and equipment means most when we know how much machinery was being used. The figure representing "total assets" is not of much significance when it stands alone. The important thing is, how much of these assets does the association actually own and how much represents borrowed capital?

Comparisons such as these should be made by the speaker, and one of the most effective ways of doing it is through the use of carefully prepared charts, graphs, and diagrams.

3. Talks by "outside speakers." - Guest speakers are frequently invited to address annual meetings, and they may fall under the category of "entertainment" as well as under "information." If the guest speaker is a notable personage, or if he holds an important position, his presence may add prestige to the association in the eyes of the members. His appearance on the program may also help to "get out the crowd."

Guest speakers therefore may be invited for their own sake, for the sake of the message they have, or for both reasons. It should be obvious that a guest speaker need not be prominent if he has a valuable contribution to make.

Whatever the reason for inviting the guest, he should be invited far enough in advance so that there is a reasonable likelihood of his having the time available. He should be assigned a subject or given his own choice, as the planning group thinks best. He should be given a time limit. If he is not familiar with the group to which he is to speak, he should be furnished with some "background information" which he can utilize in his talk if he so desires.

Arranging for the "Props"

Just as a stage play requires scenery and "properties" to be used by the actors, an annual meeting requires certain paraphernalia to dress it up and to facilitate its progress. The assembling of these odds and ends is a job in itself that may well be entrusted to a "property man." He should be in on the planning from the start so that he can list and secure the necessary items.

These may include everything from pencils and paper for voting to charts and diagrams to illustrate talks. They include programs, tickets (if they are used), and any other printed or typewritten material that is to be distributed. They include a gavel, ash trays, and water. Many of the things may be procured at the last minute, but some of them may take days or weeks to prepare. In either case the responsibility for having them on hand should be delegated to an individual, and needless delays and annoyance can thus be avoided.

VI. GETTING OUT THE CROWD

Getting out the members to attend the annual meeting may or may not be something of a problem. If the previous meetings have been spirited,

entertaining, and worth while from the members' viewpoint, there is but little difficulty involved. If previous meetings have not been outstanding, more effort will be required.

In either case the advance planning includes a decision on what it will take to help draw a good crowd. It may be a meal; it may be an important speaker; it may be some special entertainment feature. It may be a combination of all three. Some associations develop a theme - some important or interesting question to be brought up for discussion, such as "Should the association build additional facilities" or "Should membership be limited?"

Perhaps attendance can be stepped up by making it a family affair, with something of special appeal to the women and children. Some associations have followed the plan of holding a general informational session in the morning, and providing a movie-house program for the women and children in the afternoon while the actual business is being transacted. Other associations have secured the cooperation of local merchants in putting on special sales for the day of the meeting. At least one association has followed the practice of giving door prizes, the individuals being given numbered tickets as they arrive with a drawing for the prize at the very close of the session.

When the decision has been made on the program and its "drawing cards," the next step toward securing a large attendance is plenty of advance publicity. Premeeting publicity may include the formal notice of the meeting; letters; circulars, stickers, or rubber-stamped notices in all outgoing correspondence; posters; newspaper stories; and word-of-mouth advertising.

The Official Notice

The bylaws of many associations provide that notice of the annual meeting shall be mailed to each member at his last known address 10 to 15 days in advance of the meeting. A bare statement as to the time and place, however, does very little to stimulate interest. At no additional cost, except the expenditure of some thought, the official notice can be dressed up into a sales letter that will do a lot toward creating a desire to come. (See Appendix, page 28).

Reminders in Correspondence

Each letter written to a member during the period immediately preceding the annual meeting can be used effectively as a reminder. Some associations do this by incorporating one or two appropriate sentences in the body of the letter itself; others do it by adding a "P.S." at the bottom. In either case, only a short statement is needed. For example: "It looks as though we will have a good attendance at the annual meeting this year. I hope you are planning to come. Don't forget the date - January 16, Community Hall at Simpson, 9:30 a.m."

Small folders describing the meeting also may be used as stuffers in outgoing mail. A gummed label or rubber stamped reminder of the time and place may also be used.

Posters

Much interest can be created by the use of posters playing up the attractive parts of the program, for display at the association's offices, in store windows, etc. The art classes in high schools frequently are willing to cooperate in a poster contest with small awards for the best and with all entries available for display.

Newspaper Stories

A story in the local newspapers a few days before the date set for the meeting will help to increase attendance. Most local editors are glad to get local news of this kind, provided it is well written and contains such items as the date and place of the meeting and the names of some of the persons who are to take part in the program. The names of the directors whose terms are expiring and whose places are to be filled are items that the editor will want included in the story. Many associations have meetings mentioned in the local papers as many as three times before the meeting. The first mention is a natural result of the directors setting the date and place of the meeting. The second can be centered around the announcement of the chief speaker. The third gives all the details mentioned just a day or two before the meeting.

An advertisement in the local paper may be helpful from several standpoints, not the least of which is its demonstration of the cooperative's support of other local enterprises.

Word-of-mouth Publicity

Most effective of all forms of publicity is probably word-of-mouth. Employees and directors may well make it a point of business to talk up the meeting on every occasion and during every conversation with a member. Interest can be created and the individual member can be given a feeling of responsibility if he is simply asked for suggestions as to what might be brought up.

Word-of-mouth publicity can be organized to reach practically every member by the selection of a committee, or of one individual in each community, to call upon or telephone the members. This procedure can be further stimulated by arranging a contest with small prizes for the group or locality which has the highest percentage of attendance.

VII. STAGING THE BIG EVENT

If the planning has been well done, the actual staging of the annual meeting is relatively simple business. The meeting, in fact, is largely "made" before it has begun. There remains, of course, the actual conducting or carrying out of the program - but with well-laid plans even a poor chairman cannot ruin the occasion, and a good chairman can make it an outstanding success.

Although the chairman carries the chief responsibility for the final effectiveness of the planning that has been done, he should have a corps of behind-the-scene aides, each of whom has a well-defined contribution to make toward the success of the gathering. The chairman may be compared to the captain of a team, calling the signals at the appropriate time.

Figure 4. - The annual meeting provides one of the best opportunities of the year to bring the members up to date on the progress made by their association.

One of his team, for example, will have arranged for the entertainment, and on the day of the meeting that individual will personally see that that part of the program is in readiness. Another individual or committee will have charge of the food. The "property man" will see that all the books, papers, charts, and other paraphernalia are at hand. Someone will examine the hall well in advance of the meeting hour to see that the heat, light, and ventilation are in order.

If the advance planning is complete in all details, an individual or a welcoming committee will be on hand to greet the members as they arrive; to show them where to place their wraps; to introduce them to other guests; to "make them feel at home." They will be given programs and seated, and the ushers or committee members will tactfully get the crowd into the hall so that the meeting can start on time.

The Job of the Chairman

The presiding officer is not only the captain of a team, he is also the master of ceremonies, the judge and jury, and the timekeeper. From the moment he calls the gathering to order until the time he announces it adjourned, everything is in his hands; everything is under his guiding control. It is a part of his job to keep this control, and to exercise it wisely, fairly, and diplomatically.

His own advance preparation should include complete familiarity with the program. He usually will have well in mind the remarks he intends to

make at various points in the proceedings. He will know the names and titles of those he intends to introduce, and have enough background information about them to be able to properly present them. In general, it is the duty of the presiding officer (1) to keep the meeting moving; (2) to be fair and impartial; (3) to preserve order; and (4) to encourage the members to participate.

1. Keeping the meeting moving. - A prompt beginning and an on-time adjournment are earmarks of a well-ordered meeting. An announcement at the beginning that the session will adjourn at a certain definite hour helps to put everyone at ease. It helps to keep them at ease and prevent them from becoming restless if the proceedings move smoothly, to the point, and without hitches. If, in addition, the chairman can manage to build up among his listeners a feeling of anticipation for some of the later features of the day, the entire program will be one in which "there wasn't a dull moment."

To keep a meeting running on time requires a watchful eye. It must be done, also, without the appearance of unduly hurrying any of those who are given the floor. It must be done with full recognition of the desirability of encouraging discussion and membership participation.

2. Maintaining fairness and impartiality. - A successful chairman must indicate by his attitude and by his conduct of the meeting that it is his desire to be perfectly fair and impartial. He must lay aside all personal preferences or dislikes and, in any discussion, give to each side an equal opportunity to present its views. On rare occasions, of course, he may wish to relinquish the chair to the vice president and express his views from the floor. In such instances, parliamentary law dictates that he shall not return to the chair until that particular matter is disposed of. The chairman should bear in mind, however, that he may lose his appearance of impartiality should he take sides and participate in debate too frequently.

3. Preserving order. - It is the duty of the presiding officer to preserve order and to see that the meeting is conducted in a business-like manner. Ordinarily, he should not permit a member to have the floor without first addressing the chair nor permit the members to talk back and forth to each other. It is customary not to permit a matter requiring action to be discussed without a motion first being properly moved and seconded. This brings the matter before the house officially. The chairman will find his job of preserving order much easier if he insists that all questions be addressed to the chair and have the response made either by the chair or by someone recognized by the chair.

The chairman should tactfully avoid having the debate on a motion dragged out unduly by frivolous, trivial, or immaterial discussion. Usually he can find a convenient time to break in and ask, "Are you ready for the question?" Nor should the chairman permit motions to be made and seconded which have nothing to do with the business of the association. He has the right under parliamentary law to rule out of order motions that are frivolous or dilatory and which obviously are made to obstruct transaction

of the business before the meeting. As a matter of fact, the chairman has the right to refuse to recognize or give the floor to any one bent on obstruction. If such rights are exercised tactfully and wisely, the chairman will find that he can keep the program moving along on schedule and at the same time avoid offending anyone.

4. Encourage the members to participate. - As a general rule the most satisfactory meeting, from the standpoint of the member, is one in which he himself takes part. Not every member, of course, can be given a place on the program. However, members can and should be encouraged to ask questions and to express opinions before being called on to vote on special problems of the association. Likewise, the members should be encouraged to exchange viewpoints on the association's operating policies and to discuss plans for the future operation of the organization.

This type of participation in the program not only gives the management a better understanding of the various members' points of view but also stimulates the members themselves to do more thinking about their association and its problems.

If the members are hesitant about entering into the discussion, the chairman may wish to invite comment by some such statement as the following: "We have heard from several of the older members regarding this question, now what do some of you younger fellows think about it." Or, "I don't believe we have heard from any one over in Lewis County on this matter, what do you men think about it?"

VIII. AFTER THE MEETING IS OVER

Even after the annual meeting is over there are some things that can be done that will add to its effectiveness. These include (1) the preparation of newspaper stories and publicity on what was said and done; (2) the sending of thank-you letters; and (3) an appraisal of the meeting as a guide to future planning.

1. Newspaper stories and publicity. - Newspaper stories on the annual meeting provide an opportunity for a cooperative to get some of its story across to the general public. For this reason a news article, to be most helpful to the association, should begin with some of the facts or figures reported at the meeting, or with some outstanding statement of one of the speakers. It should also include such information as the time and place of the meeting; who presided; the number of members attending; a brief resume of the program, including the names of a few persons who had a prominent part; and the names and addresses of the new directors.

2. Thank-you letters. - Immediately following the meeting some associations send a letter to each person who had a part in the program, thanking him for his assistance in making the meeting a successful one. This builds good will for the association and tends to make each of these persons realize that the time and effort spent in preparing for his part in the program were appreciated.

3. Appraising the meeting. - It is often said that hindsight is better than foresight. Immediately after the meeting is the best time to size up the program as a whole and to appraise its strong features and its weaknesses. It is a good time to begin planning the next year's meeting. Officers and directors should properly follow a practice of getting together as soon as possible after the meeting to talk it over frankly and realistically from the standpoint of attendance, effectiveness of the program, and possible changes which would be desirable another year.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLE OF CALENDAR OF THINGS TO DO[2]

As a first step in preparing for the annual meeting, some people find it helpful to jot down a list of "things to do." If these are arranged according to the time the "things" should be done, the list will serve as a reminder and help to assure that important matters will not be overlooked or left until the very last minute. The "Calendar of Things To Do" outlined below is intended merely as an example. Each co-op manager should, of course, prepare his own list and include in it only those things that are applicable to his particular situation.

Things To Do
Not Later Than the Fifth Week Before the Meeting

Outline tentative plans for the annual meeting.

Discuss plans for the annual meeting with the board of directors.

If inserts are to be used for outgoing letters, they should be prepared and their use started. If envelopes and letterheads are to be stamped with an announcement of the meeting, the stamp should be obtained.

Advise farm-organization leaders and other associations in the territory of the annual meeting date and request them to cooperate by scheduling no other important farmers' meetings on that date.

Get in touch with outside speakers to determine if they will be able to accept invitations.

Things To Do
Not Later Than the Fourth Week Before the Meeting

Make arrangements for the use of a hall.

Prepare letters to, or contact, the persons who have been selected to assist in conducting the meeting and advise them of their duties.

Address envelopes to each member for use in sending out official notices.

Contact the chairmen of the various member committees appointed to assist with the meeting and discuss plans or arrangements with them.

Have official programs printed.

[2]Adapted from similar material presented in "Suggestions for Holding Effective Annual Meetings of Production Credit Associations," Farm Credit Administration, 68 pp. 1939. (Processed.)

Things To Do
Not Later Than the Third Week Before the Meeting

Prepare the official notices to members and invitations to special guests. Send news release announcing decision of board of directors as to date and place of meeting to all newspapers in the territory.

Have "Reminder Notices" printed and address them.

Contact chairmen of entertainment committee, lunch committee, and all other committees for reports as to their arrangements.

Determine what materials or supplies will be needed so arrangements can be made for obtaining them.

Make arrangements for banners, charts, and signs that may be needed at the meeting.

Prepare and put up posters in office and other places frequented by members.

Assist chairman to outline the program and procedures to be followed in conducting the meetings of the annual meeting advisory committees.

Things To Do
Not Later Than the Second Week Before the Meeting

Check for possible conflicts regarding the meeting place.

Make certain that chairmen of entertainment committee, lunch committee, attendance committee, and all other committees have completed all their arrangements.

Check over the envelopes addressed to all members for changes. Add envelopes for any new members and take out any for those who are no longer members.

Mail the official notices to all members in accordance with bylaws.[3]

Mail letters to the list of special guests after checking over the envelopes to determine any changes or additions needed.

Check on arrangements for lunch.

Have a conference with the director who is to present the report for the board of directors to review his report and suggest possible improvements.

Send news release announcing name and background of the principal speaker and one or two other features of the meeting to the newspapers.

[3]Check bylaws in this regard.

Things To Do
The Week Before the Meeting

Mail reminder notices.

Notify the chairman of the lunch committee the probable number expected.

If printed programs are not to be distributed, prepare typewritten copies for the directors, officers, chairmen, members of committees, and others who are to appear on the program.

Request the members of the reception committee to be present at least 45 minutes before the meeting is to start.

Request the ushers to be present at least 30 minutes early to receive instructions.

Review all final arrangements for the annual meeting; instruct all persons regarding their duties and responsibilities. Make any revisions which will obtain more effective results.

Prepare final news release regarding the details of the program for the meeting and names of directors whose terms expire and send to papers in the association's territory.

Things To Do
The Day Before the Meeting

Check over all arrangements for possible omissions or conflicts. Check all details such as:

> Heat for the hall - lunch arrangements - registration plans - piano - song sheets - pencils - blackboard - chalk - eraser - pins - thumb tacks - banners - signs - circulars - charts - chairs - programs - blank minutes for the meeting - ballots, etc.

Invite newspapermen to attend the meeting.

Things To Do
The Day of the Meeting

Check over the number of chairs. Arrange chairs so that adequate aisle space is provided.

Put up banners - charts - signs - displays, etc.

Give final instructions to reception committee.

Assign places to the ushers, and explain their duties to them.

Supervise those to whom responsibilities have been delegated.

Greet folks at the meeting.

Things To Do After the Meeting

Make yourself, other employees, and directors available to discuss individual business with any persons who desire to stay.

Prepare news articles and release to all newspapers.

Write personal letters to all committeemen, speakers, and others who contributed to the success of the meeting thanking them for their work.

EXAMPLE OF DETAILED PROGRAM FOR USE OF THE CHAIRMAN[4]

In order to keep the meeting running smoothly and on schedule, the chairman should be thoroughly familiar with the program. He should know the names of those he intends to introduce and have enough background information about them to be able to properly present them. He usually will have in mind the remarks he intends to make at various points in the proceedings.

Some chairmen like to prepare a special program for their own use and include in it more detail than is shown in the printed program given out to the members. The example shown below will illustrate some of the things that can be done in this regard.

10:00 a.m. Call the meeting to order.

1. Ask everybody to stand and join in singing "America."
2. Welcome members.
   - (a) Ask those who are attending their first annual meeting to raise their hands high, their second, their third, their fourth, their fifth, and those attending their sixth to stand. Give them a nice handclap of recognition.
   - (b) Express pleasure to see so many visitors, such as the county agent, home demonstration agent, and teachers of vocational agriculture. Indicate our appreciation of their interest in our association and their cooperation with us.
   - (c) Call on the county agent for a few remarks.
   - (d) Say that we would be glad to hear from any of the other visitors who are present.
3. State purposes of the meeting.
   - (a) To report to members on the general and financial affairs of their association.

[4]See reference cited in footnote 3.

(b) To elect two directors for 3 years to fill the two expiring terms.

(c) To give members an opportunity to express their views regarding the association and make suggestions for improvement.

(d) To give the members an opportunity to become better acquainted with the directors, officers, employees, and each other.

4. Mention briefly the program for the day.

(a) The main features of the morning program. (1) Address by Dean Jones; (2) Report of Board of Directors; (3) One-Act Skit by 4-H Club Members.

(b) Time and place of lunch (12:00 in basement of this building.)

(c) Main features of afternoon program. (1) Annual Business Report; (2) Committee Reports; (3) Election of Directors.

(d) Time of adjournment (promptly at 4:30 p.m.)

5. Appoint Miss Harris to take minutes of the meeting.

6. Have the secretary read official notice of the meeting. Order the notice and affidavits filed with the minutes of the meeting.

7. Have the secretary read the minutes of the last meeting.

(a) Ask if there are any corrections or additions. If none, state that the minutes will stand approved as read.

10:30 a.m. Introduce Dean Jones:

Dean of State Agricultural College - keenly interested in cooperatives - relationship between college and this association - work done at college.

After address call on Miss Smith for vocal solo.

Express our appreciation for her kindness in appearing on the program.

11:00 a.m. Present the Board of Directors' report, using the outline previously prepared.

1. Ask the other members of the board of directors whether they would like to add anything to the report.

2. Call on the members for questions concerning the report.

11:30 a.m. Announce 4-H Club Skit.

12:00 Make announcements regarding luncheon and the afternoon program.

1. Lunch will be served immediately in the basement of this building. The ushers at the rear of the room will direct you to the basement.

2. After lunch we shall reconvene in this room and start the afternoon session promptly at 1:15 p.m.

   The afternoon session will be the business session. It is important that as many of the members as possible be present.

Afternoon program

1:15 p.m. Call the meeting to order.

Announce that the meeting will be adjourned promptly at 4:30 p.m. and urge the members to remain until that time.

Call on the manager to present the Annual Business Report. Just before the manager starts his report announce that a panel of four members have been selected to ask questions after the presentation of his report, and the financial report which is to follow.

(a) Ask the panel members selected to please come forward and occupy the chairs provided here in front.

(b) Introduce the members of the panel - C. R. Worth, B. K. White, G. W. Green, and Bill Barnes.

(c) Mention that panel members were given copies of the two reports in advance of the meeting so that they would be prepared to ask questions that they thought those attending the meeting would be interested in.

1:45 p.m. Call for financial report by Mr. Blank, Treasurer.

2:15 p.m. Call for the panel questions.

1. When panel members finish asking questions on the report ask audience if they have any other questions they would like to ask before we proceed to the next order of business.

2. When discussion of questions asked is completed call for a motion to accept the reports as presented.

3. Order report filed with minutes of meeting.

2:45 p.m. Announce that the next 45 minutes will be given over to committee reports.

1. Call on Mr. Ortz to report for the committee that was appointed to study the advisability of building a new warehouse.

   (a) Ask what action the members wish to take on this report.

2. Call on Mr. Laws to report for the committee on "Dividend Policy."

   (a) Ask what action the members wish to take on this report.

3. Call on Mr. Abbot to report for the membership committee.

   (a) Ask what action the members wish to take on this report.

4. Ask whether there is any other unfinished business to come before the meeting.

3:30 p.m. State that we are now ready to elect two directors for a 3-year term.

1. Explain the importance of the election.

   (a) It is the members' opportunity to exercise control over their association by electing the men they feel are best qualified to represent them.

   (b) Every member has only one vote regardless of the amount of stock he owns so every member is on an equal voting basis.

   (c) We want this to be a very democratic election with everyone taking part and asking any questions they care to.

2. Indicate that the two directors whose terms expire are Mr. A. M. Johnston and Mr. C. J. Casto.

3. Indicate how the nominating committee of three members was selected. The members of this committee are Howard Franklin, James Hall, and John Johnson.

   (a) Mention that nominating committee was instructed to inform the members of the qualifications they considered a director should have and the basis on which they selected their nominees.

4. Call on Mr. Franklin, chairman of the nominating committee, to make the report of that committee.

5. Call for any nominations from the floor. Allow ample time and encourage such nominations.

   (a) The name and address of anyone nominated from the floor should be written on the blackboard and the person making the nomination asked to say a few words about experience and qualifications of the man he nominated.

   (b) After all nominations from the floor have been made or if there are no nominations from the floor, state that a motion is in order for the nominations to be closed.

6. Ask all those nominated to please come to the front so they may be introduced.

7. Remind the members that they are to vote for only two of the candidates nominated.

8. Ask the ushers to collect and count the ballots.

   Announce that the "surprise" listed on the program will be a 5-minute concert by "Smoky" Smoot and his one-man band. Call on "Smoky" to begin the concert.

   Announce the results of the election. Express to the retiring directors the appreciation of the association for their services.

4:15 p.m. Ask whether there is any other business to come before the meeting.

1. Get each proposal in the form of a motion. Ask for a second. Give time for discussion. After each vote announce whether the motion carried or failed.

2. Express appreciation for the interest members have taken in the meeting and the pleasure of having so many of them attend.

3. Ask members to give us any suggestions they have regarding this meeting and ways to improve next year's meeting.

4. Ask members to join in popular patriotic song.

4:30 p.m. Call for a motion to adjourn.

EXAMPLE OF NOTICE OF MEETING

This annual meeting notice has the advantage of brevity:

> The annual meeting of the Oak Hill Farmers' Cooperative Association will be held next Saturday at the High School, 9:30 a.m. sharp. You are urged to attend.

But this one is much more likely to create interest and help bring out the crowd:

> **JANUARY 16 - MARK IT ON YOUR CALENDAR!**
>
> That's the date for the annual meeting of the Simpson County Farmers' Cooperative Association - and we know you'll want to attend! The meeting will be held in the Community Hall and will start promptly at 9:30 a.m.
>
> An exceptionally fine program has been arranged - plenty of entertainment, worth-while speeches, and interesting reports. Music by the "Old Grey Mare Band."
>
> A copy of the printed "timetable" of the various events is enclosed. You will note that Dean Jones from the State College will be with us again. The Dean's talks are always good. His subject this year is "How to Build a Better Co-op." You owe it to yourself to hear him.
>
> The Auditor's report will be streamlined and modernized through the use of charts, maps, and diagrams. Your association has just completed one of the most successful seasons in its history. Let Mr. Brown tell you where the money came from and how it was distributed.
>
> These are only two of the many interesting features. There will be plenty of time for discussing the association's problems. Come prepared to take part. Now is the time to bring up those questions that you have had in mind concerning the association and its operations.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> P. S. Don't forget the date. January 16, Community Hall at Simpson, 9:30 a.m. We'll be looking for you.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM CREDIT ADMINISTRATION
KANSAS CITY 8, MO.

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